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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT CHEN'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF CESSATION OF THE NATIONAL UNIFICATION COUNCIL AND GUIDELINES

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies gave prominent reporting and editorial coverage March 4-6 to the U.S. State Department's statement last Friday urging Taiwan to unambiguously affirm that its February 27 announcement did not abolish the National Unification Council (NUC); President Chen Shui-bian's interview with the Japan-based "Yomiuri Shimbun" last Friday in which he said it is not entirely impossible to push for a referendum for the new constitution in 2007; and the year-end Kaohsiung and Taipei mayoral races. Almost all Chinese-language papers reported on the State Department's statement on their front pages March 4. The pro-unification "United Daily News" ran a banner headline on its second page that read: "'Cessation' Is the Bottom Line; If Taiwan Concedes, 'the Whole Month's Efforts Would Be Wasted.'" The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, however, ran a news story on its page two with the headline: "Cease the NUC [Functioning]? Abolish the NUC? James Huang: Taiwan and the United States Have No Difference [in Wording]."

Several papers reported March 6 on an opinion survey commissioned by the Institute for National Policy Research and conducted by the China Credit Information Service Ltd. that revealed that 87 percent of the respondents said they think Taiwan's future should be decided by the 23 million people on the island. The "United Daily News" spent a whole page March 6 reporting on an academic seminar on "Cross-Straits Relations and Taiwan's Security in the Wake of the Cessation of the NUC and NUG."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, editorials in the pro-independence "Liberty Times," "Taiwan Daily" and limited-circulation, English-language "Taipei Times" all urged the government to stick to its position in ceasing the functioning of the NUC by following mainstream Taiwan public opinion. A commentary in the "Taipei Times" pointed out three major benefits for Taiwan brought about by President Chen's decision on the NUC. An "Apple Daily" commentary said as long as Chen does not go too far, and enables the United States to regain control, then the matter about NUC and NUG can be resolved. Soochow University Political Professor Lo Chih-cheng said in an interview with the pro-unification "United Daily News" that the State Department's statement was aimed at clarifying matters with Beijing, not at pressuring Taiwan. Editorials in the pro-status quo "China Times," pro-unification "United Daily News," and limited-circulation, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" all criticized Chen for making a big mistake

with the NUC matter and ruining the mutual trust Taiwan has with the United States. A "United Daily News" editorial also urged Chen to stop pushing for a referendum on Taiwan's new constitution. A "China Times" editorial said Washington and Beijing are engaging in the "co-management" of cross-Straight issues for the first time. End summary.

A) "Taiwan Should Stick to Its Position of [Asserting Its] Sovereignty Even When Facing Pressure"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized (3/4):

". [U.S. State Department Deputy Spokesman Adam] Ereli's statement [Friday] was totally unnecessary because our government's clarification, including President Chen's seven-point statement made publicly following the National Security Council meeting Monday, was sufficient enough to remove doubts about relevant questions - namely, the cessation of the NUC and NUG does not involve any change of the status quo and that [we will not allow] Taiwan's status quo of democracy, freedom and peace to be unilaterally altered. It is noteworthy that since Ereli is the deputy spokesman of the State Department and his statement was published in writing on the State Department's web-site, it might be a result of China's complaint to the United States [about Taiwan], as claimed by Foreign Minister James Huang. In other words, perhaps [Ereli's statement] was made by the United States in response to China's pestering. .

"What's more important is that even facing severe internal and external obstruction, the cessation of the NUC and NUG has finally been completed. The move indicated solidly that Taiwan must have its own ideas and insistence with regard to issues concerning its own future. . President Chen has suffered great pressure from the United States on his path to deepening Taiwan's democracy, including his push for holding [the island's first-ever] referendum and the

cessation of the NUC and NUG. Chen's firmness and [fearlessness to] endure insults in order to achieve his objectives is worth wide support of the Taiwan people. Following these two experiences, Taiwan people should realize that despite many external obstacles, Taiwan's assertion, be it a referendum to determine its own future or a move to define the cross-Straight status quo, will be realized eventually as long as it sticks to the universal values of democracy. ."

B) "Opposition to the Cessation of the NUC and NUG Is Akin to Opposition to [Taiwan's] Mainstream Public Opinion"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] asserted (3/6):

". The fact that Taiwan is a democratic country and Taiwan's future should be determined by the 23 million Taiwan people is an undisputable theorem. The cessation of the NUC and NUG is simply a move to get rid of one layer of the many restrictions on Taiwan people, and the other moves, including the rectification of Taiwan's name and writing a new constitution should, without doubt, be promoted. ."

C) "China and Those Who Take the China Road Stir up Trouble; the United States Should Respect Taiwan People's Right of Choice and Prevent China from Invading Taiwan"

The pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" [circulation: 100,000] editorialized (3/4):

". Immediately following Chen Shui-bian's announcement to cease the functioning of the NUC, China started to complain to the international community [about Taiwan] and assert that 'cessation equals abolition.' The pan-Blue politicians and pro-China media outlets also echoed Beijing to smear the government efforts to return dignity to Taiwan people by saying that 'cessation of the NUC equals Taiwan

independence.' All [such moves] thus aroused the United States' doubts about Taiwan. . .

"Taiwan and the United States share common interests in many aspects and the two have no evident difference over cross-Strait issues. China's mobilizing the united-front force to smear Taiwan is actually aimed at sabotaging the substantive interests between Taiwan and United States. China is really targeting the United States when it intends to cope with Taiwan. The deeper China's force gets into Taiwan, the more dangerous Taiwan's situation becomes, and the less favorable the situation becomes for the United States. . . Taiwan's democracy is founded because of the United States' promotion [of democracy]; the United States [thus] has the responsibility to protect Taiwan from being invaded by China. As the 'world's policeman,' the United States has no reason to overlook the Taiwan people's move to pursue their legal rights or to push Taiwan to China. The United States should support the Taiwan people in holding [the right to determine] their own future, and the cessation of the NUC is to preserve the room for choice for the Taiwan people and their decedents. . ."

D) "[Taiwan] Must Lose No Time in Pushing for the Writing of a New Constitution and Rectifying [the Island's] Name, And in Protecting Taiwan's Security via 'De jure Independence' in Order to Prevent China from Attacking Taiwan!"

The pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" [circulation: 100,000] said in an editorial (3/5):

". Chen Shui-bian's announcement regarding the cessation of the NUC and NUG was aimed at giving back Taiwan people their dignity and the opportunity to control their own destiny. . To ensure its national security, Taiwan must push for the writing of a new constitution and rectifying the island's name. [Taiwan needs to] institute a Taiwan constitution and get rid of the ROC constitution. The relationship between Taiwan and China is, legally speaking, a relationship between two states, namely, an international relationship. Only when being placed under an international framework (such as the U.S.-Japan security alliance) can Taiwan be protected from China's unreasonable and ruthless demands. . To ensure Taiwan's position in the international community, the top priority is to get rid of the ROC system, and the proactive way [to do so] is to push for the writing of a new constitution and rectifying Taiwan's name. . ."

E) "Don't Ignore Good That Came from End of NUC"

Leou Chia-feng, doctoral candidate in London University's department of politics and international studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, said in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (3/4):

"Prior to the commemoration of the 228 Incident, President Chen Shui-bian announced that the National Unification Guidelines will cease to apply and that the National Unification Council (NUC) would cease to function. However, some alarmist pro-unification media outlets, politicians and other people in Taiwan launched a series of attacks on Chen and against independence without consideration for the positive results of Chen's decision.

"First, the most important result of doing away with the NUC and its guidelines is that it has forced the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) to acknowledge that independence can be an option for Taiwan's future. Over the decades, the KMT has vilified independence to the point where it has become tantamount to war, leaving no room for rational debate. The KMT . . . has also been forced to respond to the pressure brought by the debate over the council and its guidelines to acknowledge for the first time that the people of Taiwan have the right to choose independence. . .

"Second, Chen has created an opportunity to make the US

fully understand Taiwan's situation and needs. Although the US openly opposed the passage of China's "Anti-Secession" Law last year, it has not taken any substantive action to prevent the cross-strait "status quo" from tilting in China's favor, but has sat idly by as Beijing has developed its carrot-and-stick approach in dealing with Taiwan. At least Chen's decision to scrap the NUC and its guidelines has made the US begin to look at Taiwan's difficulties in maintaining the `status quo.'

"Although the US was not very understanding of Chen's intentions at first, statements by the State Department indicate that Washington is finally beginning to understand Chen's decision. Third, the incident has made Taiwanese understand the difference between the green and blue camps' cross-strait and diplomatic policies. The pan-blues' statements about the abolition of the NUC and its guidelines have all along been built on the premise that, so long as Taipei acts like a good boy, Beijing and Washington will reciprocate with a lollipop. The pan-green camp, on the contrary, believes that absolute obedience will continue to blur one's own viewpoint and damage one's own interests. In the case of the NUC and its guidelines, reality shows that if we dare fight for our interests and engage in pragmatic negotiations, we will be able to achieve a lot more. There is no need to restrict or confine ourselves. ... We certainly should not feel complacent due to the abolition of the NUC, for there are indications that before the matter was finalized, Washington had put tremendous pressure on Taipei. . ."

F) "Taiwanese Will Decide for Themselves"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (3/5):

"Just what exactly was the action taken by the Taiwan government toward the National Unification Guidelines and National Unification Council (NUC)? There has been some confusion and debate over the past week. Without question, the official wording used by the government and President Chen Shui-bian was that the guidelines had `ceased to be applied' and that the NUC had `ceased to operate.' However, in the media and even among the general public, whether deliberate or unintentional, the action taken has often been simply referred to as "abolished." That this seemingly innocent discrepancy in reference was sufficient to invite the concern of the US government goes to show how the unification-independence issue strikes a raw nerve in many.

"Whatever differences may exist between `abolished' and `ceased to operate and apply,' they are at most conceptual. Some say that if the guidelines and NUC have been abolished, they no longer exist, and therefore unification is no longer an option for Taiwan. It should be pointed out that neither the NUC nor the guidelines are tangible. Until recently, their existence has supposedly not been in doubt. However,

has this existence helped Taiwan to move any closer to unification? The answer is of course not. Regardless of whether Taiwan has moved further away from or closer to unification over the past years, that movement had nothing to do with the guidelines or the NUC. Instead, the popular will of the people of Taiwan remains almost the sole determinant. ... Even if the guidelines and NUC have genuinely been `abolished,' unification will remain an option -- so long as the Taiwanese want to keep it an option. Now that the NUC and guidelines have been confirmed as continuing to exist -- except that they now cease to apply and cease to operate (since when have they ever operated or applied anyway, some may ask) -- does that make unification any more plausible than before when they were erroneously considered to have been `abolished?' Better still, before and after they ceased to apply and operate, was there any difference in terms of the likelihood of Taiwan unifying with China? The answers to these questions are only too obvious.

G) "The United States Can Eat [i.e. Win Over] Both Sides of the Strait"

Columnist Antonio Chiang wrote in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] (3/6):

"The U.S. Department of State demanded in a strongly-worded statement that Taiwan unambiguously state whether the NUC still exists. Chinese leaders also condemned in a stern voice Ah-bian's word games at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Both Washington and Beijing have demonstrated a tough attitude. The situation appears not good. In fact, the real winner may be the United States. .

"The timing and technique of Ah-bian's cessation statement has disturbed the Americans and China. But it may not necessarily be in conflict with the U.S. strategic interest. As long as Ah-bian does not go too far, can find a way out, provide China with an explanation, and enable the United States to regain control, then this matter can be resolved.

"This is a false issue whether it is NUC abolishment or cessation. Both U.S.-Taiwan and cross-Strait relations were further damaged after Taiwan went through this disturbance. Our internal abstract space seems bigger. But the external substantive space will only shrink. The loss will outweigh the gain."

H) "Lo Chih-cheng [Speaks of] Crisis over Cessation of the NUC and NUG; [Taiwan Should] Mend Taiwan-U.S. Mutual Trust in a Low-Profile Manner"

Journalist Huang Ya-shih wrote following an interview with Soochow University Political Professor Lo Chih-cheng in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (3/6):

". The United States' statement regarding the cessation of the NUC and NUG [last Friday] was mainly aimed at clarifying to Beijing not at pressuring Taiwan. Washington's move did not surprise me, and it will happen again before and after the meeting between [U.S. President George W.] Bush and [Chinese President] Hu Jintao [slated for April]. But I don't think the United States will really ask Taiwan to put in writing that 'Taiwan did not abolish the NUC and NUG.' This move will be like to ask President Chen to commit a political suicide. [We] should not underestimate the United States' political wisdom and its understanding of Chinese. .

"Taiwan wanted to 'make noise' not to 'make trouble' by using the issue of cessation of the NUC and NUG. No one can restrain Chen from saying or not saying some things. But now is time for prudence of words and behaviors. [Chen] has [successfully] moved two steps forward and one step back, and [no one knows] whether [he] will have to move a few steps back soon. ."

I) "How Can a Ruler Lead His People into an Unknown Disaster?"

The pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (3/6):

". That's right, when [speaking of] playing schemes, Uncle Sam was defeated this time. They underestimated the

toughness of Bian's administration and were not vigilant enough about Taiwan's situation, nor did they have the awareness to take any precautions. Washington first accepted unwillingly [Taiwan's] word game of 'cease to function,' then it got angry when the Taiwan authorities trumpeted and boasted about its victorious achievement, demanding that Taiwan announce unambiguously that it did not abolish the NUC and NUG. Now the United States has re-adjusted its position by insisting that altering any of the

`Five No's' pledges is to change the status quo; the move is actually to see that Chen return to the original framework under escort.

"The Americans had no clue of the real situation at all. Shouldn't the ruling party have trumpeted loudly? Well, the whole point [of the NUC and NUG issue] is to trumpet loudly! In essence, be it abolition or cessation of the NUC and NUG, it is a symbolic move. Will it still be symbolic if the move is small and unnoticeable? The direction of [Chen's] road is very clear now. On the one hand, Chen wants to duplicate the victory that he enjoyed when he [successfully] tied [Taiwan's first-ever] referendum with the presidential election [in 2004], and on the other hand, he wants to extend his political influence. That's why he decided to push for the referendum on Taiwan's new constitution, which is reminiscent of Taiwan independence, before he steps down, to put Taiwan into the severest confrontations between independence and unification, and to intensify conflicts across the Taiwan Strait, in an attempt to facilitate the DPP's chances of winning the presidential election in 2008. . Since Chen wants to present a new constitution reminiscent of Taiwan independence, he first had to get rid of the `incantation hoop' made of the `Five No's' pledge. When he tore apart the last `No,' the other `Four No's' also fell apart. Now Chen can do whatever he wants. .

"For the U.S. policy-making authorities, what matters now no longer lies in Chen's credibility but in how to effectively remove the fuse of Taiwan independence, or at least not to let conflicts rise across the Taiwan Strait. But the whole process of `cessation of the NUC and NUG' this time exposed that the United States could be so vulnerable when facing a Taiwan leader who doesn't care about anything; perhaps [such a revelation] even surprised the United States itself. If the United States failed to stop issues such as the abolition of the NUC [this time], what will it do to stop something more serious in the future? The cross-Strait issues are of critical importance to the United States' national interests. If Washington continues to view Taiwan from its old perspective, it might find the island very difficult to deal with in the future. ."

J) "Cheating Both Insiders and Outsiders: Does the DPP Still Want to Hold the Joyful Rally for Celebrating the NUC Cessation?"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (3/4):

"Chen Shui-bian has gotten into a big trouble. The U.S. authority has shown its hand to him. . The truth has been disclosed: in this `NUC cessation' disturbance, Chen Shui-bian and the DPP were, in fact, playing a double game, `cheating both insiders and outsiders. .'

"The fact that Chen Shui-bian dared to maneuver the U.S.-China-Taiwan triangular relationship in such a manner is actually not because of his courage, wittiness, and ability to manipulate the global situation. It is only that he believes: the two nuclear powers, the United States and China, will unlikely start a world war just because of my small word game of `NUC cessation/abolishment,' will they? Furthermore, if the United States and China want to punish me Chen Shui-bian, the 23 million people of Taiwan will be penalized as well! These ideas of Chen Shui-bian are full of opportunism and taking chances. They are definitely not out of bravery, rationality, and strength. Chen's trickery and fabrication has repeatedly proved effective in domestic politics. The Americans were played tricks on during the `anti-missile/buy-missile referendum. However, this time when the same trick was played once again in front of the Americans, it was obviously like a cart pushed and crashed on the wall!"

"[One] should never down play the seriousness of the U.S. `March 2 statement.' It can be described as the most

personal-directed and the toughest-worded formal written document in dozens of years of U.S.-Taiwan interactions. (In the past, no such wording was seen even when treaties were abolished or diplomatic relations severed.) The United States not only has had different assessment on Chen Shui-bian, but also must have had [new] realization about the DPP's unpredictability. ."

K) "The Next Step: Chen Shui-bian Should Immediately Stop [Promoting] the Referendum on a New Taiwan Constitution"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] commented in an editorial (3/6):

"The successful U.S. prevention of Chen Shui-bian's denial of the 'One Will-not' is just an appetizer. The main dish is that [it] has prevented Chen from moving recklessly toward the restricted zone of denying the 'Four No's' and trying to [have] a 'referendum on a new Taiwan constitution' by means outside the institutionalized route. ."

"If Chen could make a touchdown in scraping the 'One Will-not,' the next step will naturally be proceeding toward scraping the 'Four No's.' Then, [promoting] a 'referendum on a new Taiwan constitution' would be an open script. Therefore, the United States took the opportunity when it resolved the 'One Will-not' crisis to point to the 'Four No's'. The U.S. strategy is to demand Chen publicly promise as he declared 'NUC cessation' (not 'NUC abolition') that 'any constitutional reform will follow the current constitutional procedures.' . Faced with this situation, we believe, Chen should proactively put an end to the ongoing 'referendum on a new Taiwan constitution' movement, which is holding its 10,000 scheduled discussion sessions now. ."

L) "United States and China Operate Co-Management of Cross-Strait [Issues] for the First Time"

Professor Chen Yu-chun, Director of Chinese Culture University's Graduate School of American Studies opined in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (3/4):

". Beijing's warnings and criticism against Bian will not stop now, but its strategy direction will be 'fighting together better than fighting alone.' In other words, Beijing will join the United States, the international community, and Taiwan people to jointly restrain Chen Shui-bian's move that 'attempts to change the status quo' by describing him as the 'troublemaker' for cross-Strait stability and 'peace saboteur' for the Asia-Pacific region."

M) "Wearing out Our Welcome"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (3/5):

"Over the past few weeks, President Chen Shui-bian's administration has played a game of words that has caused serious harm to our special relationship with the United States. . ."

According to the U.S. State Department, Taipei has promised not to diverge from the carefully selected script, under which the NUC and guidelines were not officially 'abolished.' Foreign Minister James Huang has blamed the problem on erroneous news media reports and claimed that the matter was cleared up after discussions with officials from the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT). Once again, officials are unfairly blaming the news media for allegedly being the source of all their problems.

"Regardless of what was cleared up with AIT, the fact remains that our American friends have been forced to parse words and sift through videotapes of press conferences to determine whether our government is still trustworthy. Given the unique geopolitical situation that Taiwan is situated in, we simply cannot afford to place Washington in

such a precarious position. ... It would seem not to be rocket science to assume that it would not be wise to irritate the United States by making promises that our officials can't keep for a single day. It would also seem improper for our American friends to be kept guessing as to what the genuine intentions of our leaders are, despite weeks of intense communications behind the scenes. But that is precisely what our government leaders are doing, putting our long-term security and interests at serious risk. ...

"But over the past few years, President Chen's administration has squandered this positive development by constantly changing the status quo and making messes for the U.S. to help clean up. We will not be surprised if the United States decides it is better off leaving us to sleep in the bed we have made for ourselves. President Chen should realize the long-term harm he is causing by offending and irritating the United States before our welcome is completely worn out."

N) "Chen Hopes History Will Remember Him More Kindly"

Joe Hung said in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] (3/6):

"Don't be surprised. It's Chen Shui-bian the defense lawyer at his best. Only a day after the U.S. Department of State officially asked him to reinstate one of the five 'no's' he had pledged, President Chen told the Yomiuri Shimbun of Tokyo on Friday he will give the people of Taiwan a 'timely, relevant and viable' Constitution before he steps down on May 20, 2008. .

"A consummate defense counselor, Chen insists his decision to 'cease to function' did not either 'abolish' or 'terminate' the Council, whose National Unification Guidelines concomitantly 'ceases to apply.' The fact is that he meant to abolish the organization President Lee created but told Washington what he announced should be considered to merely 'freeze' it. Washington went along - until reports quoted or misquoted his aides as giving an accurate interpretation of his intended wording. In a way of responding to the ultimatum of Foggy Bottom, President Chen defiantly spelt out his time schedule for the new Constitution to the world's largest newspaper. He did so, stubbornly convinced that Washington could do nothing to harm him as it didn't many times in the past couple of years when he defied Uncle Sam.

"Chen would be able to get away almost unscathed this time. But at what cost to Taiwan! We have lost what little national credibility was left. Oh, yes. Chen wants to be remembered in history as the president who sets Taiwan on course to independence. History will record Lee Teng hui as the president who transformed Taiwan from an autocratic state to a democracy. Much as he may wish, Lee has no chance to lead Taiwan to independence. Chen, his unanointed heir, has no such chance, either. But the younger man has whipped his party into line to obey his marching orders for independence.

On this year's Peace Memorial Day, President Chen addressed a meeting to mark the fifty-ninth anniversary of the February 29 Incident of 1947. He iterated his decision to terminate the National Unification Council and asked his loyal audience if he was wrong in doing so. 'Am I wrong?' he asked seven times. There was a chorus of 'no.'

"Let me answer his question: 'Mr. President, you are not wrong. You've made no mistakes. The president is always right. It's your supporters who were wrong. They voted you in.' History will not be kind to President Chen. Grandchildren of our grandchildren will remember him as the president who got reelected because he had been shot at by a mysterious gunman presumed to be an assassin."